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Wijers, G.D.M.

published in
Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs
2013

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs

Wijers, Gea D. M. (2013), Contributions to Transformative Change in Cambodia: A Study on Returnees as Institutional Entrepreneurs, in: *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32, 1, 3–27.
ISSN: 1868-4882 (online), ISSN: 1868-1034 (print)

The online version of this article can be found at:
<www.CurrentSoutheastAsianAffairs.org>

Published by
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies and Hamburg University Press.

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Contributions to Transformative Change in Cambodia: A Study on Returnees as Institutional Entrepreneurs

Gea D. M. Wijers

Abstract: This paper explores the experiences of Cambodian French returnees who are contributing to transformative change in Cambodia as institutional entrepreneurs. In order to delve into how returnees and their work are perceived in both host and home country, this multi-sited research project was designed as a comparative case study. Data was primarily collected through conversations with individual informants from the Lyonnese and Parisian Cambodian community as well as selected key informants in Phnom Penh. Excerpts of case studies are presented and discussed to illustrate the history, context and situation of their return as these influence their institutional entrepreneurial activities and the ways in which they use their transnational social networks as resources. It is argued that the process of return and the initiation of institutional entrepreneurship are best explored through the threefold activities of returnees' brokering, bargaining and building for transformative change as affected by (trans)national opportunity structures and institutions.

■ Manuscript received 30 June 2012; accepted 28 May 2013

Keywords: Cambodia, institutional entrepreneurs, remigration, transformative change

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An Introduction: Cambodians in Exile

At the time of the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia (1975–1979), an estimated 40,000 refugees were legally granted asylum in France, its former colonizer (Duclos and Cogne 2008). They consisted of a relatively small first wave of forced migrants arriving and obtaining residency, and a large group of voluntary Cambodian "knowledge migrants", such as exchange students, that were already in France. All of them were granted official refugee resettlement status after having already lived in France as temporary residents while pursuing their studies or completing internships under the educational cooperation agreement between the two countries. Arriving before 1979, these first groups of refugees were distinguished as well educated and easily "integrated" due to having spent a substantial amount of their adolescence and adulthood in Cambodia under French influence. In general, the first groups of refugees showed relative independence in resettlement, language proficiency, cultural awareness of their new surroundings and their social belonging to the Cambodian middle or upper classes.

After 1979, following the opening of Cambodian borders, these initial refugees were joined by a larger number of Cambodian exiles fleeing the Vietnamese takeover (Mignot 1984; Mysliwiec 1988; Prak 1992). Some of them stayed in France, others moved on to third resettlement countries that offered better connections or opportunities. In 1989, an estimated 50,000 Cambodians were living in France. Family reunions and knowledge migration saw this number grow to about 63,300 by 2000 (Simon-Barouh 1989; Nann 2007).[1] It is difficult to ignore that while every year many Cambodian French citizens return to Cambodia for the long or short term, the dynamics of Cambodian French community life and their remigration choices are still little studied or understood (Wijers 2011).

Transformative Change and Transnational Social Networks

This paper[2] explores how Cambodian French returnees are perceived, and personally feel, to have contributed to transformative change in Cambodia

1 As the French government does not allow for ethnic statistics, all these numbers are based on independent research by different authors.

2 The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the NWO-WOTRO Science for Development organization through the Cambodia Research Group, as well as the support of the Graduate School of the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU University Amsterdam in preparing this paper.

through their initiation of institutional entrepreneurship upon return. Transformative change, a key concept, is understood as a strategic social process aimed at the profound socio-economic and political development of society through "democratization".[3] It is studied from the perspective of the remigrants' "transnational social network", a concept that is not the main instrument of analysis in this paper, but nevertheless merits an introduction.

A central concept of transnationalism is that of the "trans-migrant", developed in the influential work of Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992, 1995). Their research spawned a strand of migration studies focused on migrants who become "trans-migrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders" (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1992: 259). Of importance in this context of transnational behaviour is the interconnectivity between people at the grass-roots level as social experiences evolving in social "fields". As an idea, transnationalism takes place "from below" through a multitude of involvements between migrants' host and home countries in networked relationships, and is neither determined by national governments or national organizations, nor bounded by national borders (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999).

These "unbounded" activities are hard to research and have posed a challenge for many scholars. Research in both migration and returnee studies often neglects the multiple embeddedness of its subjects as well as their dual positioning. The majority of studies seem to focus on either the home or the host country (for exceptions, see Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Mazzucato 2007) and do not explicitly acknowledge the many ways in which entrepreneurial returnees, in particular, contribute to their home country's transformation. The starting point for this exploration is to fill this gap by studying the classic triangular interdependence between the returnees, their overseas immigrant communities, and society in the home country (Cohen 1997). According to Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994), this interdependence may be reformulated as a dynamic between three notions of return. This dynamic consists of interactions between (1) the receiving

3 As there is no universally agreed-upon definition of 'democracy' and a complete and critical discussion of this contested concept will exceed the limited space of this article, I will adhere here to Dahl's fundamental democratic principle. He proposes that, when it comes to binding collective decisions, each person in a political community is entitled to have his/her interests be given equal consideration (Dahl 1989). This very basic description includes the necessity of free elections to take place as well as acknowledging citizens' freedom of speech, so relevant to the case of Cambodia. Explicitly, thus, I will not discuss issues related to 'democratization' such as processes of 'modernization' and 'industrialization' or 'transitional justice'.

country's idea about the returnees' ongoing incorporation into the country of resettlement, (2) the sending country's idea about the returnees' belonging to their ancestral nation state, and (3) the returnees' own views on a shared belonging and loyalty to both worlds (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). Building on, among others, Tsuda (2003, 2009), Kloosterman, Van der Leun, and Rath (1999), Yeung (2002), and Flores (2009), this research explores Cambodian institutional entrepreneurs' remigration as an enduring multi-sited and networked action. This action is understood as consisting of the interaction between actors' personal histories, their entrepreneurial skills and resources, and their chances of employing the opportunity structures available to them. These actions are affected by the consequences of their embeddedness in the structural institutions that rule the (trans)national arena as visible in the ideas on return held by host and home countries.

Institutional Entrepreneurs

The definition of "institutional entrepreneurial activity" central to this research encompasses the idea of contributing to the common good; acknowledges the embeddedness in societal structure, power, and interests; and yet emphasizes the individual's evaluation and agency in employing opportunity structures in institutional entrepreneurial activity. Thus, institutional entrepreneurs are understood as "organized actors with sufficient resources who see in the creation of new institutions an opportunity to realize their interest" (DiMaggio 1988: 14). They are assumed to be, directly and indirectly, influenced and regulated by institutions in host and home countries in a continuous dynamic. Thus, inherently, entrepreneurial activities aimed at institutional reform are embedded social actions involving actors that want to make change happen. While some authors have recognized a great number of differences in elements that turn an actor, individual, organization, or social movement into an institutional entrepreneur, this study seeks to highlight the nexus of personal entrepreneurial skills in the discovery and use of opportunity as well as shedding light on their mobilization of resources (Li, Feng, and Jiang 2006; Shane 2003).

While transnational social networks are assumed to be a possible resource for every returnee upon return, in this study the emphasis is on Cambodian French returnees' institutional entrepreneurial activities. These entrepreneurial activities are understood as being focused on the creation or improvement of institutions for the common good, thus promoting transformative change in the Kingdom of Cambodia (DiMaggio 1988: 4; Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen 2009: 478). The findings on the political and institution-

al context in which institutional entrepreneurial activities were initiated are considered of major importance for the interpretation of the experiences obtained during interviews as well as in written sources. The analysis of the situational dynamics of institutional entrepreneurship in a country under a restrictive regime that lacks, for instance, freedom of speech and freedom of press, like Cambodia (Cambodian Center for Human Rights 2010), may rightfully be considered as a contribution to discussions on transformative change in an emergent nation. This aspect will receive attention in a distinct section and is also illustrated by excerpts from the case study of professor Sor.

Returnees as Agents of Change

Related to their transnational social networks, the returnees' multiple embeddedness may be considered beneficial or disadvantageous vis-à-vis their contributions to transformative change. Embeddedness is understood not as an act or situation, but as the ongoing production of social legitimacy (Granovetter 1985). When it comes to entrepreneurs, Kloosterman emphasizes the occurrence of "opportunity structures" in the dynamics of embeddedness. These opportunities may be seized by a skilled actor with "the levels of financial, human, social and perhaps ethnic capital needed to enter a specific market" (Kloosterman 2006: 4). These elements enter into relationships that produce a "mixed embeddedness", referring to the opportunities warranted by a time-and-place–specific opportunity structure to take social action. Moreover, from an entrepreneurial perspective, Yeung agrees that returnees are "both facilitated and constrained by ongoing processes of institutional relations in both home and host countries" (Yeung 2002: 30). These transnational institutional relations are perceived by Yeung as consisting of social and business networks, political-economic structures, and dominant organizational and cultural practices in the home country and host country in which these entrepreneurs are embedded and which may shape the outcomes of their activities (Yeung 2002).

This issue is important as, when it comes to the returnees' activities upon return, current literature on the impact of their entrepreneurial activities in institutional reform is rarely conclusive in its empirical findings. Some studies bring to light a marked ambivalence on the conditions and constraints regulating the efficiency of the refugees' contributions (see, for instance: Beckert 1999; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Olesen 2002; Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002). Considering the mixed findings on both the role of entrepreneurial activity in bringing peace and prosperity to states recovering from conflict (see, for instance: Naudé 2007; Schüttler 2006) and

the limited validity assigned to findings on the effectiveness of returnees' actions and transnational engagement to bring about institutional reform (see, for instance, Agunias 2006; Castles 2007), many questions about the effectiveness of returnees' ambitions to "do good" and contribute to transformative change in their former home countries still need to be answered (see, for instance, Davids and Van Houte 2008; Sussman 2011; Wijers 2013).

The limited literature on Cambodian French returnees and my personal observations at the Ministry of Environment in Phnom Penh (2005–2006) propose that they are predisposed to try to improve the system from within. Looking for social legitimacy and working on their embeddedness, they accept positions in governmental organizations and function within the system to "voice" their ideas, thereby tacitly accepting the current state of affairs (see, for instance, Gottesman 2003: 286, and Sam 2008: 168–169). While some authors have acknowledged that remigration may often lead to social exclusion and marginalization for groups of returnees (see, for instance, Cassarino 2004; Tsuda 2003), the sources and social consequences of these processes of return have mostly attracted attention in research on diasporas related to large sending countries such as, among others, China and India (Dahles, Verduijn, and Wakkee 2010).

Bringing Together "Worlds Apart"

The "success" or "failure" in institutional entrepreneurship is difficult to assess as these normative evaluations are subject to personal and cultural values. Therefore, as mentioned above, this research does not highlight the full spectrum of institutional entrepreneurship but concentrates on experiences, perceptions, and initiatives to work on transformative change. It is limited to those acts that were considered "exemplary institutional entrepreneurial activities" by members of overseas communities as well as by their peers and stakeholders in Cambodia. These activities were analysed through the challenges and constraints "successful" institutional entrepreneurial activities have had to deal with (Van Wijk 2009).

Individual cases were built based on a select group of Cambodian French returnees working in the governmental or non-governmental sectors in Phnom Penh. These key informants varied in their affiliation with governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the degree of change they envisioned. These two sectors were chosen to limit the research population to informants focused on transformative change in Cambodia through the public sector. The informants selected from these sectors were assumed to have the aim of contributing to the "public good". They were asked to inform this study based on their belonging to the first waves of

overseas refugees (leaving Cambodia before 1980) who have the unique quality of being eyewitnesses to and participants in the events dividing and reuniting Cambodia and Cambodians overseas and in host countries. Illustrative excerpts from anonymised case studies built around key informants will guide the discussion in this article.

In the case studies, this research attempts to present descriptions, personal "narrativizations", and qualitative assessments obtained in interviews and during the study of relevant literature. In contrast to personal narratives such as life stories, a narrativization focuses on particular "selected" experiences considered pivotal by the narrator in ethnographic interviews (Atkinson 1998; Kohler Riessman 1993).

The adoption of a multi-sited design was relevant as such research holds the promise of integrating perspectives in data collection and analysis, the benefits of a people-driven approach, and the completeness of acknowledging national institutional structures while following informants' social networks across borders. Because of this comparative approach to the experiences of selected individual Cambodian French informants in France and Cambodia, the multi-sitedness resulted in a juxtaposition of phenomena that would conventionally appear to be "worlds apart" (Marcus 1995: 100–102).

Members and leaders of community organizations in Lyon were contacted systematically and assisted in the recruitment of other informants – that is, through snowball sampling (Goodman 1961) – mainly in Lyon and Paris. Contacts were asked to put me in contact with returnee institutional entrepreneurs working in Phnom Penh whom they considered successful in their position within the overseas Cambodian community and in their contributions to transformative change in Cambodia. In this way, the method of selection also provided insights into the perceptual basis of a returnee's "success" in the ethnic community (Saunders 1979). The research population for case selection was limited to the first generation of Cambodians – those born in Cambodia and who entered a resettlement country before 1979 in the first waves of exile.[4] This generation holds considerable status in both the host land and homeland. Their activities and social environment in both France and Cambodia were explored.

In an initial three-month period of fieldwork, 20 members of, and stakeholders in, the Cambodian community in Lyon were interviewed at least once. Also, members' activities on behalf of the Cambodian community were observed and field notes were taken during social events. This group consisted of women and men ranging in age from 29 to 82 who were in-

4 For information on the return of the second generation, see Mariani 2013, forthcoming.

volved in the Cambodian community in Lyon. These conversations were complemented by five interviews with members (35 to 67 years of age) of the Parisian Cambodian community. During another three-month period of fieldwork in Phnom Penh, 35 informants were interviewed. The group of informants, key and individual, consisted of 10 women and 25 men; the youngest was 31, the oldest 78 years of age. Five key informants allowed my involvement in their organizations as a way to conduct participatory observations. Interviews were supplemented with field notes taken during social events as well as information from personal, professional, and documentary sources.

Data analysis involved, first, the broad analysis of interviews to determine main themes and establish the first version of a codebook. Then, the interviews were made subject to more detailed deductive and inductive coding in atlas.ti, a software tool for qualitative data storage and analysis. Finally, in order to follow patterns that had been discovered in the process, fine coding and axial coding brought forward specific issues and experiences that are presented in this paper.

Findings: Returning to Cambodia

To understand the context of returnees' narrativizations, the opening up of Cambodia to a first wave of returnees between 1991 and 1993 may be considered a key event. This period is described through excerpts from the interviews and interpreted within the information provided by relevant literature.

Upon his arrival at Pochentong Airport in Phnom Penh, Professor Tim, a Cambodian French teacher, describes his emotions: "La choix est fait quand on arrive" (Interview Phnom Penh, August 2010). For him it is clear that the choice to stay or go is "made" for you upon arrival. Professor Tim had come back on a holiday in 1995 and then felt compelled to stay.

For the country to open up to the many returnees longing for their home country, however, international intervention was needed. There had been calls for well-established, well-positioned and wealthy overseas Cambodians to return under the Vietnamese-inspired governments in 1987 and 1988 – though these were met with some suspicion and limited response (Gottesman 2004). In 1991, negotiations led to the Paris Peace Accords (also called the Comprehensive Political Settlement for Cambodia), signed by four factions, and established under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). When the Paris Peace Accords were signed, many returnees finally made their way back.

Madame Pas, a Cambodian French lady who went into politics, explained as follows:

> [I] had nothing in particular to do in France. I wasn't married. I was innocent, had just finished my studies. In Cambodia there was the UNTAC, the Paris Peace Accords had just been signed, things were happening (Interview Phnom Penh, October 2010).

Relevant to this study, Professor Tim and Madame Pas arrived in the distinct post-conflict context that UNTAC's mission created.

Findings: Politics and Power

Findings show that those returning to Cambodia from 1991 to 1993 generally received a warm welcome and found opportunities for their resettlement in the implementation of UNTAC strategies to prepare Cambodia for its first democratic elections. While a detailed discussion of the conception, content, and consequences of the Paris Peace Accords is beyond the scope of this paper, some additional effects of the UNTAC's achievements merit a mention (Hughes 2002; Ear 2007). According to Monsieur Mil, a Cambodian French civil servant who started an educational NGO, it started a process of brokering for governmental positions within Cambodian French transnational networks: "They just called each other and more and more people came over and got a job through their networks" (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010).

Reports on transitional Cambodia under the UNTAC and the interviews with returnees show that the transitional authority allowed for the traditional patronage system to return (Brown and Zasloff 1998; Hughes 1996; McAndrew 1996). According to Monsieur Kam, a volunteer at the time:

> For an intellectual, there was nothing much else to do but go into government. Most of the NGOs were American or English-based and held little attraction for the Francophone Cambodians. So it's just common sense that many of the French returnees went into government (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010, translated from French).

To a certain degree, of course, the return to tradition is a necessary process in post-conflict societies. The rebuilding of familiar contexts, to a degree, for new institutions is part of human nature (Gottesman 2002). It could be a positive development as in Cambodia the improvement of state capacity at this time was accompanied by societal empowerment. The government tried

to connect itself with the people; however, it did so by (re)building the vast patronage networks reaching down to the community level. Findings show that only those inside the new "democratic" system were able to use and choose the rules and norms to their own advantage.

In the process, some of the Cambodian returnees managed to become part of the "elite", for the longer or shorter term. This networking earned the returnees a very mixed reputation. For the overseas returnees, entering into government provided alternative routes to leadership as they could not claim traditional authority through business success or previous importance in home or host country (Bloemraad 2006).

Professor Tim clarifies these choices and the need to use old friends and connections in order to survive. He explains how the decision to return left him in a difficult situation as there was "nothing" to do: "Unless you agreed to join one of the big political parties it was impossible to find a job that would earn a living."

While Tim felt very welcome and the Hun Sen government stated clearly that the country needed the returnees in its reconstruction, salaries were not to be expected. According to Tim, the well-educated returnees speaking multiple languages were clearly at an advantage. They could apply their skills, be brokers and use their knowledge to bargain between interest groups to remain neutral. Those with little education and funding were quickly forced into a partisan position and patronage dependency to get by (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010, translated from French).

The UNTAC period came to be known as a period of power abuse and corruption. It seems that the type of people returning at this time had been very successful in overseas host countries – for lack of a better phrase, they could be perceived as the "well integrated" and well educated, wanting to contribute to the transformation of Cambodia. As Madame Pas explains, for example:

> The French were the first wave to arrive. It was easiest for us as we still had so many connections and the local political parties all went to France first to lobby for good candidates for the elections. That's where many of the leaders had been educated themselves (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010).

Alternatively, another prominent group of returnees were those that had "failed" in their host country and returned to retrieve their old status and networks. They were described as "opportunistic" and opposed to change. The re-establishment of old structures allowed them to retrieve their former status.

The attraction of a certain social status and job security thus inspired unqualified returnees to run for official political positions as a means to

obtain a livelihood. The situation contributed to an image of the overseas returnees – often labelled the *anikatchun* (Khmer, literally: "foreign person") – as opportunists (Le Gal 2010). Their return was perceived as originating from self-interest. This label and the accompanying stereotypes were experienced as pejorative and painful by many of the returnee informants in this research. They felt that the diversity of backgrounds and potential in the groups of returnees was not sufficiently acknowledged, their contributions were not valued, and they were excluded from reintegration after the initial warm welcome.

In 1997, things literally exploded during and after a military coup by strongman Hun Sen's forces, now part of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). After clashes in Cambodia, Prince Rannaridh, the leader of the Cambodian French-initiated opposition party Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif (FUNCINPEC), went into exile in Paris. FUNCINPEC had been a true "diaspora" initiative and many expectations of change were invested in them. The public felt deceived, however, when many FUNCINPEC party members sought and found refuge within the CPP and the government (Frieson 1996; Roberts 2002). Ever since these events, the ruling CPP has consolidated its hold on Cambodian society. However, although the economy is slowly emerging, the country has seen little change when it comes to politics and power relations (Hughes and Un 2011: 10). Monsieur Kam describes how things have quietened down, yet remained volatile over the years:

> I vividly remember in the early and mid-1990s, that when we went to restaurants, people used to show their social status by displaying guns, rifles, and hand grenades on the tables. Later on, people became more civilized and then they displayed their expensive hand phones. Now, they have become more cautious and do not display their wealth because of the theft (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010, translation from French).

Officially, Cambodia is classified as a constitutional monarchy and a multiparty democracy. Nevertheless, Hughes and Un (2011) characterize the current Cambodian government, largely dominated by the CPP, as "paying lip service" to international (Western) principles of liberal democracy and maintaining the patronage system under the pretext of "good governance" (Hughes and Un 2011: 199–218). The Cambodian government and the plethora of NGOs established in the post-conflict period (after 1991) are both ruling the country and turning it into a "hybrid democracy". These forces complement, overlap, and compete with each other in different sectors of society, with both trying to control the social (re)construction of institutions. A fuzzy system of governance has evolved that does not seem

to allow for a true reconciliation between the conflicting interest groups that played a role during the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese takeover (Center for Policy Analysis and Research on Refugee Issues 1991; Linton 2004). Others who have written on Cambodian politics have suggested that the fight for democratic ideals, in effect, is led by an international civil society of donors and NGOs, and not by the representatives of the Cambodian government (Öjendal and Lilja 2002, Hughes and Un 2011). It seems that next to the Western ideal of "good governance" on the NGO agenda, traditional dynamics maintain structures of "good-enough governance" within governmental organizations (De Weijer 2011). In this article, I will not go into the complexities of Cambodian politics much further, but will refer to the current system of "competing hegemons" in Cambodia as it is a hybrid democracy.

Findings: Contributing to Transformative Change

Madame Lim, a Cambodian American lawyer of French descent, explains how hard it was for her to start up her foundation:

> There is no Cambodian American community here. I don't feel I belong to the group. The Cambodian French and Cambodian Americans never meet and they could never work together, there are so many contradictions here. Then again, I don't get accepted by my French Cambodian friends either. They don't say they are Khmer, they say they are French when they are here (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2011).

While the first returnees faced many hardships related to the stabilization of internal relations, the Cambodian government slowly adjusted its attitudes and started to acknowledge that Cambodian returnees may have a significant role to play in the long-term processes of domestic (economic) development, peace-building and reconstruction (Gottesman 2004). Since then, the unrelenting engagement of the Cambodian "diaspora" in their home country and communities of origin has come to produce significant flows of money, human capital, networks of social capital, knowledge and technology, and political support (Ear 2007; Poethig 1997). Nevertheless, in recent history, all groups of returnees have had to deal with cultural exclusion in the sense of being referred to as not "pure" Khmer (no matter their ethnicity) and have been subject to the government's nationalist rhetoric that aims to marginalize social groups. For the informants of this research, as Madame Lim's remark demonstrates, there is a distinct lack of a general "returnee commu-

nity" in Phnom Penh. Madame Kanthoom, working for an international NGO, recounts an event she witnessed just that morning:

> People react to the returnees, now, I think. It always amazes me how people still discriminate against us. Like this morning at lunchtime we had an NGO-leader meeting and we were mapping who we needed to meet at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I said: We need to meet Mr. So-and-so, and then the leader of one of the NGOs said: "But he is an expat, he is a returning Cambodian. He may not be influential, he may not know, he may not be internal in the CPP." And I think, these people are still being discriminated against. The stereotype is of a person who is not internal in the CPP, not influential, that they do not know enough (Interview Phnom Penh, October 2011).

Attitudes towards overseas returnees of the first generation, especially, seem to question their loyalty and knowledge, and others display limited trust when it comes to handing over responsibility and leadership in societal change. However, as Monsieur Than, a Cambodian French member of parliament, says:

> It's not about the returnees specifically, it's really about power and money. In reality it's about control and not about development. Things have changed now since the beginning, when it was very much about safety. Now if you touch the money or the power then you get into trouble. As long as you don't touch the power or the money you will be fine (Interview Phnom Penh, October 2011).

For instance, as Prime Minister Hun Sen remarked on the behaviour of members of the government holding dual nationality in 1996, "Don't say you are Khmer when it is easy and American when it is difficult" (Hughes 2002). Since then, no distinct policies or organizations have been put in place to facilitate transnational connections and returnee contributions. The contributions of the returnees are not explicitly acknowledged and they seem excluded from mainstream politics.

Professor Sor

To illustrate these findings and explore the narrativizations and experiences of Cambodian French returnees on a more personal level, the case of Professor Sor is presented. His experiences are analysed in this section by comparing them to accounts of other key informants.

Institutional Entrepreneurial Activities

> Professor Sor is employed by the executive committee of an institute of higher education. Again, for reasons of anonymity, the exact activities and output of this organization will not be described here. Suffice it to say that this semi-governmental organization is often seen as linked to the ruling political party.
>
> Professor Sor is an intellectual who is widely known for his radio shows, publications and television appearances where he discusses Cambodian politics and history. His position is presented as an example of a returnee's attempts to initiate transformative change from within an institution by taking part in the government – a position easily criticized by individual informants in both France and Cambodia.
>
> Remarkably, Sor is not a historian by trade but holds the equivalents of a bachelor's degree in French literature, a master's degree in philosophy and a PhD in political science. This broad field of expertise allows him much room to express credible views to the public. He appears to be a spokesperson on a diversity of subjects, be they historical or political. The aim of his institutional entrepreneurial activities is to establish a solid research curriculum for institutions of higher education in Cambodia and work toward their universal accreditation. So far, the results have not been very positive. Additionally, he considers it his task to raise awareness of the relevance of the social sciences and national history through publications and public appearances. In this respect, informants in both France and Cambodia say he seems more successful.

It is generally accepted in entrepreneurship research that marginalized actors (here, returnees) are potentially strong "change-agents" (see, for instance: Leblebici et al. 1991; Seo and Creed 2002: 241; Yeung 2002). Madame Pas explained, however, that the returnees did not necessarily want to effect change or "be different".

Rather, the choices of these returnees are economically motivated. Because it was very hard to find French-speaking positions with an NGO in the UNTAC years, it made sense for the Cambodian French returnees to enter government in those days. The close ties between France and the Cambodian elite made it relatively easy to find "patrons" to sponsor a political position and sustain a livelihood. There were very few French NGOs, and UNTAC required knowledge of English that was often lacked by Cambodian French returnees. Moreover, in her experience, the French were reluctant to hire "Cambodians", however long they may have lived in France

and regardless of whether they had obtained French citizenship, and preferred to employ "real" French nationals (Interview Phnom Penh, October 2011). In this way, the cases in this study demonstrate in what ways economic factors play a role upon return.

Mister Hui, a returnee from the United States who works for a human rights NGO, makes the following observation:

> We have a few friends who came out to do business and they lost. Maybe their networks weren't very good. They might have gotten themselves into trouble they were not aware of. They ended up in trouble and they got cheated (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2011).

To be effective, in theory, actors positioned as brokers between cultures and nations will have access to more information and resources. Moreover, they should have transnational resources (social and human capital) to bargain with. Yet, in reality, this access requires them to maintain extensive and diverse networks while safeguarding their multiple embeddedness. It is hard, however, to earn the trust of compatriots that is so essential to their social legitimacy when one is perceived as having "dual loyalties". Nevertheless, only when these requirements of trust and belonging are met can returnees try to make substantive contributions to transformative change through institutional entrepreneurial activities.

The problem with Cambodia and the Cambodians (both overseas and in the country), according to Pas, has much to do with being uneducated, lacking culture, and not having the appropriate Cambodian "knowledge" about how to behave correctly. According to Hughes this position is natural:

> Such views, echoing the trope of Vietnamization in the 1980s, permit returnees to acquire responsibility for rebuilding the Cambodian nation and teaching those who have lost their culture (Hughes in Yeoh and Willis 2004: 211).

History seems to motivate Cambodian French returnees to claim their special capacity to "educate" Cambodians and "cleanse" the country of destructive foreign influences. There is a certain animosity between social groups in the new social ordering of Cambodia that seems to cause this specific group of returnees from France to not feel "Khmer among the Khmer" and is, thus, enforcing their sense of disconnection. Aware of the transformation in their home country, some refugees believe that they are the sole repository of their traditional culture, leading to a defensive "nationalism" as in the case of Professor Sor (Gold 1992: 18; Tsuda 2003: 363). Sor experienced a feeling of nationalist desire, spurring his desire to safeguard the "true" culture of Cambodia. This was also observed by Edwards (2009) in her work,

Cambodge, on the French influence on global and indigenous perceptions of Cambodian culture.

Transnational Social Networks as Resources

Previously in France, Sor was the well-respected, neutral figurehead of a popular and internationally broadcast radio show that raised awareness on aspects of Cambodian history. He remembers how, around 1998, the government called upon him personally to return and to assist in the foundation of the Institute for Higher Education. Then, upon his return to Cambodia in 1998, he entered the governmental sector and was offered the opportunity to contribute to the transformation of higher education while maintaining a good salary. Sor explains that, for him, it was not a difficult choice. He was promised a good salary in Cambodia that was equal to the amount he earned in France. Thus, it seems, he could secure his economic survival and social status without any political strings attached.

He accepted and stayed.

Despite this dedicated return, however, Professor Sor has kept his French citizenship and his house in Paris. As he explains, nowadays he hardly ever visits France and he is not in active contact with his international friends. In Sor's experience, it is not so much his transnational social network as the (inter)national renown he has earned with the overseas Cambodian community that enabled him to work as an intermediary. This status as an academic and "outsider" helped him obtain the position he currently holds. But things have changed.

Continuing his reflection on his activities, he says it is hard to work in an underfunded semi-governmental Cambodian organization that is no longer acknowledged or supported by its former benefactor: France. Under the CPP government, it receives little extra funding from international donors or organizations because the political and economic situation is often considered too volatile. Professor Sor feels undeservedly ignored by his former French contacts and, instead, is now investing more of his time in building his Cambodian networks to do his work. He stays in Cambodia as much as he can. Moreover, he says, returning to France on a regular basis would raise suspicions with his sponsors in the government and make his life "difficult". Sor says that it's easier to just navigate the river than trying to live his life in two countries.

Undeniably, Cambodian French returnees of the 1990s such as Professor Sor have witnessed the change of the political climate in Cambodia. When

they initially arrived, they were relatively free to move between local and international forces. They could mediate between the government and aid organizations, France and Cambodia. Fieldwork has demonstrated, however, that for many returnees to Cambodia, it may be difficult or even impossible to establish and maintain political, social, and cultural neutrality in the country in the long term. This suggests a progressive dynamic in their institutional entrepreneurial activities from being neutral intermediaries who can broker between parties, to being, as the context and perceptions of social legitimacy change, partisan players who have to strike bargains with distinct social networks to effect the change they desire.

For the Cambodian French returnees, their positive linkages to Cambodian French communities and organizations initially provided them with relatively generous room to manoeuvre in terms of bargaining. In this respect, they have benefitted from preferential treatment and an expedient inclusion into certain local social networks. The support of these social networks has served as "bargaining chips" and provided them with leverage. The association with certain networks, however, has also excluded them from reintegration at other levels of society. Fieldwork findings propose that social networks are both an enabler and a restrictor of emancipatory institutional activities. In partisan Cambodian and Cambodian French society, belonging to one social network has meant being excluded from the other. Therefore, cultural and social activities at home and abroad have had important indirect consequences for political incorporation and have allowed actors to try to change institutional structures that were trying to co-opt them. As long as the returnees have bargaining power, they will find the leverage to contribute to the transformation of Cambodia.

Feeling the threat of exclusion, these privileged Cambodian French returnees have to strike bargains and isolate themselves from social networks in either the homeland or their host countries in order to retain their autonomy:

Professor Tim said he had little contact now with his former social network in France. These relations have all slowly eroded as he built his life in Cambodia. Tim remembers that every visit home would usually lead to some of his friends also returning to Cambodia as they saw it was possible to make a living there. Not all of them have succeeded, however, as they were not able to make most of their human and social capital under the restrictive government. Their contributions were blocked by local suspicions and structural constraints. Like Professor Sor, Professor Tim does believe he was lucky. In his words, at least he did not have to remain "a stranger in a strange land", the way many of the other returnees have.

This self-exclusion, however, makes the returnees less effective in their activities and prevents their embeddedness. In this way, the awareness of a cultural identity, their transnational social networks, dual experiences and knowledge work against their effectiveness in making transformative change happen. The focus of their activities is on change, but their lack of social legitimacy makes it hard for their initiatives and ideas to be heard, acknowledged, and/or accepted.

Transformative Change

> Sor was born in Phnom Penh in 1945 into a poor family of six. By 1965, with the support of the French government, he was a professor of French literature at the Collège of Oudong. Next to his professional activities, Sor initiated a range of smaller media ventures. He founded several journals[5] and also actively participated in philosophy clubs as an adept of Sartre's existentialist philosophy. As he recalls, in those years, his entrepreneurial activities centred around the institutional reform of Prince Sihanouk's regime, which he experienced as oppressive. In 1972, he had the opportunity to go to Paris University in France. In the late 1980s, the publication of a historical book on his doctorate gave him some renown within Cambodian communities overseas. The dedication of the book and its final words may be a theme of Sor's life: "I want to return the soul to Cambodia." However, the line of criticism against him remarks on how he has lost his own soul when it comes to opposing the restrictive CPP regime.

The case of Professor Sor demonstrates how returnees' effectiveness is affected by their personal history and skills as well as their past exposure to other institutional arrangements and networks. Their mixed embeddedness in multiple social networks and opportunity structures is perceived as more negative than positive in terms of their social capital. Thus, the nature of their institutional entrepreneurial activities in Cambodia is burdened with both their histories in Cambodia as well as their life in exile in France, both still influencing their current social position in Cambodia and, sometimes, forcing them into the involuntary trade-offs described above.

When it comes to contributions to transformative change, until recently, the return of former refugees was not considered a particularly interesting subject of study. The assumption presumably being that once returned to their place of origin, people are automatically "re-rooted" and absorbed into their former homeland's habitat (Eastmond 2002: 3).

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5 *Lumières d'Angkor* (1967) and *Mahajan* (1971), while editing *Le Courrier Phnompenhois*.

Madame Pas describes the excitement, the appeal of returning for the elections. In Cambodia things were happening so she left within a couple of months to rediscover "her" people. Or, as she herself defines it: "Rediscovering a people that are so much like you, so close to you, but, most of all, so very different from you."

Existing accounts in returnee studies often underestimate the inherent challenges returnees face, after a prolonged forced absence, in restoring their lives in "post-conflict" homelands that were ridden with conflict and aggression when they left (Poethig 1997). This is not a process to be taken lightly and may present barriers to the realization of returnees' ambitions to "do good" upon return.

Conclusion

The cases in this research demonstrate that the Cambodian French returnees' social legitimacies in both France and Cambodia, in the long term, are hard to balance in a hybrid democracy like Cambodia. Local opportunity structures are shaped by social, economic, and political factors that remain outside of the agent's control. These structures remain largely unaffected by the resources available in individual transnational social networks. Overall, when drawing conclusions from the findings presented here, a mixed picture of Cambodian French returnees' contributions to Cambodia emerges. It seems hard for the returnees to find common cultural ground with their compatriots as well as with other returnees while maintaining a balance in their dual loyalties. On the other hand, both on an individual and on a social level, there seems to be much "disembeddedness" and "cultural exclusion". This may also result from the exclusive nature of governmental rhetoric and public discourse that focuses on being "pure Khmer". A majority of the informants express that this leads to frustration and a relative sense of failure in their institutional entrepreneurial ventures.

This paper has explored the history, context, and situation of Cambodian French returnees' institutional entrepreneurial activities intended to contribute to transformative change in Cambodia upon their return. The Cambodian situation demonstrates the intricacies of returnees' expectations of and contributions to the homeland. In conclusion, building on the findings, it is proposed that the initiation of institutional entrepreneurial activities, in general, may be explored effectively through the threefold activities of returnees: "brokering", "bargaining" and "building" for transformative change upon return. As intermediaries that hold dual loyalties and dual identities, it is challenging for refugees to balance their potential in being brokers for reform in a (still) traumatized country with a hybrid democracy. As this

article suggests, in the case of Cambodia, "returning" implies not only finding an opportune position and social legitimacy, but also bargaining between (trans)national social networks and institutional structures in order to reconcile those networks. Trade-offs to safeguard the social legitimacy that is needed to be effective as an institutional entrepreneur are required. In addition, returnees need to bargain to reconcile their position in "renewed" Cambodian society with their status in the country during a more violent past.

Theory and findings suggest that the returnees' brokering and bargaining for transformative change in Cambodia may support, and may be supported by, the initiation of institutional entrepreneurial activities. These ambitions could be mutually constitutive. Yet these activities by the Cambodian returnees seem temporary and singular events as they appear within a limited timeframe and do not seem to outlive the opportunity structures and actors that allow them to exist. This is related to two prominent factors: (1) Returnees of the first generation are in a unique position. (2) Returnees first have to secure their own "re-embedding" and the re-establishment of their social legitimacy to effectively help "build" the country. Their contributions to local communities need to be based on mutual trust, acceptance, and acknowledgement in order to take effect.

In summary: when it comes to building the country, the returnees' institutional entrepreneurial activities do not lead to the significant and sustainable contributions to transformative change they had intended.

Future research is needed to explore the validity of these conclusions in the long term. It would be of particular interest to reveal the sustainability of these dynamics as more and more first-generation returnees are disappearing, while the second generation of Cambodian French returnees are just entering the country.

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